

REMARKS

UPON CERTAIN

PROPOSALS

FOR AN

APPLICATION

TO

PARLIAMENT,

For Relief in the

MATTER of SUBSCRIPTION

TO THE LITURGY

AND

THIRTY NINE ARTICLES

Of the Established Church of ENGLAND.

Aliquis latet error—ne credite Teucris.

L O N D O N:

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THE ARTS

UPON CERTAIN

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TO

AN AMATEUR

FOR THE

OF SUBSCRIPTION

THE LITERARY

AND

ARTS

OF THE



LONDON

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R E M A R K S

UPON CERTAIN

P R O P O S A L S

FOR AN

APPLICATION TO PARLIAMENT, &c.

PROPOSALS for an Application to Parliament, on so important a Subject as the Abolition of Subscription, by the Clergy, to the Articles of the Church of *England*, cannot be supposed to fail of Attention.

But before we engage in the proposed Application, will it not be adviseable to consider a little, how the Plea of the
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Hardship of Subscription can be supported?

Ever since Corruptions of Gospel Doctrine began to appear, the true Professors of Christianity found it necessary to have some Set of Propositions, (or to speak more in the common Phrase of Divines, some *Formulary*, or *System of Doctrines*, call it *Creed*, *Confession of Faith*, or what you please) by which they might declare their Opinions explicitly enough to vindicate them from the Suspicion of holding certain corrupt Doctrines.—These *Confessions* were, and must be, varied as Occasion required. In the Year 1562, the Confession now in Use, consisting of thirty-nine Articles, was agreed upon by certain eminent Men amongst the Reformers in *England*, to shew their Opinions. And as many as approved of this System of Doctrine and Discipline, voluntarily joined themselves together in Communion. About nine Years afterwards, that is, in the Year 1571, the Parliament, in order to keep improper Persons out of the Ministry, saw fit to enact the Law, that no Minister, beneath the Degree of a Bishop, should be admitted to any Benefice,

fice, unless he subscribed the said Articles. And this is the Law proposed to be repealed.

Hence then it appears, that the Use of the Articles is, to distinguish the Members of the Church of *England*; to clear them from the Imputation of maintaining such Doctrines, as are there condemned; and to secure the Hearers from being bewildered and misled by Teachers of corrupt Doctrines.

To shew the Necessity of establishing Confessions, by the Opinion of an Author, who cannot be objected to by the Friends of the Proposals, consult the Confessional, Page 5. Ed. 2. where we find as follows: "*These Circumstances, (the Rise of some Sects, who were Scandals to Religion, and who pretended to defend their Tenets on Protestant Principles,) laid the Protestants under a Necessity of publishing to the whole World, explicit Confessions of their Faith and Doctrines.*"—To see that the same Necessity now subsists, we need only consider the Multitude of Sects, who call themselves Christians; said to amount to an hundred in the City of *London*.—And

to shew the Necessity of being so very large and explicit, in order to exclude Papists from the Ministry, let us recollect, that they had Equivocations to evade every Restriction laid on them before the compiling of the Articles; for that many had conformed to all King *Edward's* Injunctions, and yet been Papists all the Time; and let us enquire also, whether the Papists are in the least altered, and more easily to be guarded against, or less to be feared now than two hundred Years ago.

Can then the necessary Measure, Subscription, be reasonably complained of, as an Hardship on the Clergy?—Is it unlawful or unreasonable for those, who hold the Doctrines contained in the thirty-nine Articles, and approve that Form, to make Profession of their Belief thereby?—If it is, why are they alone, of all Protestants, to be excluded from the Right of private Judgment, and free Profession, by the very Persons who claim it as a general Right?—Is it unlawful for a Society of Christians to chuse their own Teachers; or to fix upon certain Qualifications or Conditions, which they think necessary to be required of

of their Teachers, in order to prevent the Propagation of what appear to them corrupt Doctrines, and to promote what appears to them true Religion?—Is it not a voluntary Act in every one, who offers himself a Candidate for the Ministry in the Church of *England*?—Is there any Hardship then in requiring a Person to perform a Condition, which he knows to be lawfully annexed to the Office he is a voluntary Candidate for?—Will it be said that it is hard for those, who have prepared themselves for the Ministry, to find an insuperable Objection in their Way?—If it be, we may ask, in return, whether a public Establishment is to give Way to a private Emolument?—Whether, if a Man sets out in any other Profession or Way of Life, and in his Progress finds the municipal Laws obstruct his Views, must those Laws be repealed on his Account?—Whether a Body of Christians are to accept a Teacher, who will not come up to the Conditions they think it necessary to require of him, rather than he should be disappointed?—Were the Reformers Protestants? Did they understand their own Prin-

Principles?—Did they not within four Years after the full Establishment of Protestantism, by the Accession of Queen *Elizabeth*, draw up the Articles, and within other nine Years find it necessary to establish Subscription by a Law?—And are we so little acquainted with the Arts of the Church of *Rome*, so little read in the bloody Chronicle of a *Mary's* Reign, (whom Providence no doubt permitted, for a Time, to tyrannize, as a Warning to this Nation; are we so little read in that Chronicle,) as to pull down that Bulwark, which they, who still smarted with the Remembrance of her Yoke, found it necessary to erect?—Is there no Medium between Persecution and opening our Arms to receive and cherish those Teachers, whom we believe to hold very erroneous and dangerous Opinions?—

But we are told there is sufficient Defence against Popery in the Answer to the second Question at the Ordination of a Priest.—One would think they, who assert this, either knew not that Infallibility, and all the other Corruptions of Popery, are derived ultimately from pretended Scripture

ture Authority ; or that they supposed we know not this.—Besides, had they not tried that Security, and found it ineffectual, from the fifth and sixth Years of King *Edward's* Reign to the thirteenth of *Elizabeth*?—Again, observe, how all the Engagement implied in the Answer to the Questions at Ordination may be not only evaded, but made to militate against us, by simply denominating all the fundamental Articles of Protestantism, *Errors* and *Corruptions*, which in the third Answer the Candidate engages to root up.—And who can say that a Minister, who has made no explicit Declaration of his Belief, has excluded himself from so denominating them? Or who can doubt that one popishly inclined would do so?—Farther, supposing a better Bulwark against Popery could be devised than Subscription is, ought we not to see and examine whether it be really better, before we part with that we have?—But the Truth is, perhaps, Matters are not yet ripe for this.—They want first to undermine the Foundation—and then no doubt we should have Plenty of curious Plans presented for rebuilding ; and Crowds
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Artists would busy themselves in digging Materials out of the Ruins, and erecting, though with untempered Mortar, such Edifices, as their own whimsical Fancies should approve.—But let not us be drawn in to ruin our noble Edifice, and leave ourselves unsheltered and defenceless against every Storm, by the crafty Attempts of those, who would be the first to deride us for our Folly.—

Nay, and if this Point with regard to Popery were got over, would not the very same Difficulties occur with respect to every important Error condemned in the Articles?—For (in a religious View) why do we exclude Popish Teachers from our Churches, but because we are convinced they would endeavour to propagate such Errors, as, we are persuaded, do deform the Gospel?—And does not the very same Reason urge us to exclude Teachers of all other Doctrines, which appear to us so pernicious as to require the like Caution?—

So that Subscription is not in Reality any Compulsion; as no corporal Punishment, or pecuniary Mulct would attend a Refusal;

Refusal; but it is only a Security, which Man *voluntarily* gives to the Society, on his *voluntarily* undertaking an Office of great Trust in it.—

But it is urged, “that we deprive ourselves of the Labours of worthy Men.”

—This Argument may as well be urged for the taking in Popish Teachers as any others; for doubtless there have been, and may be worthy Men of that Communion.

—The Truth is, the Argument is good for nothing in either Case.—For if there are really any worthy Men excluded, they may both exercise their Ministry in some Congregation, whose Opinions they better agree with; and also they may make public their Labours.—And again, be these Men ever so worthy upon the whole, they must have some peculiar Notions contradictory to our Principles, otherwise they would not find themselves excluded.

—And if that be the Case, ought we to open them a Way to propagate what appears to us to be Error, for the Sake of any Good we can hope for from them?

—“Shall we do Evil, that Good may come of it?”—In short, if they esteem

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our Terms of Communion unlawful, they ought to forsake us; if they esteem them lawful, they ought not to disturb us; for as to the Pretence of improving us, it is only their own Party, who would thank them for the Attempt: And as they are at Liberty to set up for themselves, they ought not to deny us the Liberty to enjoy what we approve better than their Fancies. If otherwise, how do they leave us the Exercise of the Right of private Judgment?—What should we think of a Man's Politics, who should propose the Abolition of the Coronation Oath, and the Oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy, &c. as being an Hardship on the King on one Hand, and on the Subjects on the other; and recommend the said Abolition as friendly to the civil Constitution?—Should we suppose such a Proposal to arise from good Sense, or to proceed from Ignorance, evil Design, or Insanity?—Apply the Argument; is not Religion as momentous a Concern, as civil Government?—Are not Tests and Securities as necessary to be demanded of those, who undertake Offices of Importance in the Church, as in the Court?

Court?—Let us ask these pretended Patrons of Liberty, whether the Ejection of Non-Conformist Ministers at the Revolution, was a necessary Measure, or not?—If it was, then *à fortiori*, it must be reasonable to establish Rules for excluding improper Persons from entering into the Ministry.—

And now, as we hope it sufficiently appears, that the Plea of Hardship on the Clergy, in Subscription, cannot be supported, let us a little farther examine the Consequences, if the Scheme recommended in the Proposals should succeed.—

The Friends and Abettors of it tell you, that it will not only give Ease to the Minds of many, who find themselves obliged to subscribe to what they cannot assent to; but that it will also be the Glory of our Church to stand upon a more comprehensive Bottom, as that will shew our extensive Charity, and strict Regard to the Protestant Principles, of *the Right of private Judgment*, and also of *the Sufficiency of Scripture*; and that it will unite Protestants against Popery.—Fair Prospects indeed, but alas! too flattering.—For

Whose Minds would it ease?—The Minds of those, who *do subscribe* as Occasion offers, or of those, who *do not*?—If the latter, what Burden can they have on their Minds, since they do not comply?—It might indeed ease them in their outward Circumstances; and if they are worthy, and in Want, one cannot but pity them.—But, as we have already seen, it would be a blameable Pity to prefer the private Interest of Individuals to the Safety of the whole Society.—And they who think Subscription a necessary Security, must view such Pity in this Light.—And as to those who *do subscribe*, how can they want Ease?—Because we would hope the Declaration that they do it *ex animo* is sincere, in general.—It would not be very charitable to a Set of Men, liberally educated, to doubt of it.—Yet it would also be disingenuous to deny, that there is Reason to believe some are not so sincere as one would wish; their own Declarations prove it.—But again, let us not be so uncharitable as to extend this beyond those, who directly, or by very evident Proofs acknowledge it.—And surely we may ask,
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whether these Men, thus confessedly insincere in so solemn a Matter, really merit such Indulgence, as that we should quit what we think a necessary Bulwark of our religious Liberty, to reconcile their Duty to their Interest?—And that too when it is plain the Hardship is only pretended; because their Consciences allow them to conform.—

Or what Glory would it be to our Church, under the Notion of enlarging our Plan, to give up our very Existence, as a Church?—For, doubtless, Subscription is one of the chief Pillars of our excellent Establishment.—Take away that, and you pull down the whole Edifice.—You bring the *established Mode* of Christian Profession and Worship, to a Level with those *Modes*, which are only *tolerated*.—For where is the Difference, if the Way to the Ministry in the established Church is as open to the Professors of one Set of Principles, as another?—If neither Laity, nor even the Clergy, are obliged to maintain the peculiar Doctrines of the Church of *England*, why are we called the Church of *England*?—If there is then to be an
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Establishment, let us hold fast that without which it cannot possibly subsist; preserving *reasonable Toleration* in its full Vigour.—But let us not confound *these*.—The Design is absurd even in Idea; and consequently impracticable in Fact.—Yet this the Proposals aim at, at least.—But a thinking Man can hardly doubt, but that the Experiment would be ruinous not only to ourselves, but even to the best and honestest Part of those, who now enjoy Toleration amongst us.—

As vain would be the Hope of extending our Honour by *what they call adhering* to the Protestant Principles of *the Right of private Judgment*, and the *Sufficiency of Scripture*.—For if these Principles prohibit Protestants from maintaining any explicit Doctrines, then are not Protestantism and Scepticism synonymous Terms?—And if they do not prohibit us from maintaining explicit Doctrines, then requiring Subscription cannot contradict these Protestant Principles; because no Man is compelled to subscribe.—All that we require is an honest Avowal, whether the Candidate's Sentiments agree with ours.—We require
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none to *give up* his Sentiments ; and that he may not even dissemble them, is the very Reason why an explicit Declaration is expected.—We suppose, that, considering the Wiles of our Adversaries, nothing short of our Terms is sufficient Security; and we think we have as good a Right to judge for ourselves, as any other Set of Christians have.—Besides, we shall, perhaps, scarce meet with a more narrow-minded Set of Men, (notwithstanding great Professions,) than those, whom we must conclude to be Promoters of this Scheme; if we may judge of their Principles by that Attachment to Party, and that Acrimony and Contempt towards Opponents, with which their Writings and Conversation are replete.—And if they appear to extend their Amity to any, who in some Points differ from them, we shall find it is only to such as join with them in the Pursuit of their present favourite Object, the undermining the Establishment.

And now for the concluding Motive for the Application, *viz.* that it will unite Protestants against Popery.—How will it unite them?—They, who really wish to oppose

oppose Popery, will unite *now*, in all lawful and expedient Undertakings, for that End.—And would they, who are *now* unwilling to unite, be rendered more willing by the Abolition of Subscription?—How could that operate?—Are there any, who would exert themselves against Popery, if they had Preferment in the Church of *England*, but who will not do so without it?—If such there are, are they thus to be courted?—Alas! would not this proposed Comprehension, whilst it united Numbers in Name, disunite them more than ever in Affection?—Do we not perceive, (or if we do not, where is our Observation?) that Animosities generally rise higher between those of the *same*, than between those of *different* Denominations?—Nor is it wonderful; since we find ourselves more interested in rectifying what appear to us Errors, in Proportion as we are more intimately connected with those, who fall into them.—And consequently, the Discontinuance of our present Test of Principles would be so far from uniting us, that it would make our Dissensions more violent; as being more domestic.—

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However, it would, by no Means, unite us more against Popery.—For if the Protestants of 1571, found every other Caution, except Subscription, ineffectual to exclude Papists, how should we exclude them now, if that is abolished?—No, no, if the Breach was made for those, who call themselves Protestant Dissenters, the Papists would undoubtedly enter along with them, and have a Party amongst us.—And some are so open as to say, so it ought to be. (*Priestly on Government.*) Nor indeed can they, who plead for *absolute, unlimited* Toleration, (as they chuse to express and explain it,) consistently deny them a Share of it.—And others will not hear of any Danger from Popery; how justly, let the experienced judge.—And though one must be candid enough to own, that some worthy Men, who perhaps patronize the Application, do not see these Consequences; yet surely we, who do, ought by no Means to countenance any Undertaking, which appears to us so very pernicious.—The Abolition of Subscription then, we see, is not even intended, at least by some of its Advocates,

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vocates, to unite Protestants against Popery.—

If it appears now sufficiently evident, that the Consequences, said to be aimed at by the Favourers of the Proposals, cannot justly be hoped for, let us see what others may justly be feared.—It is urged against us, that Subscription does not produce absolute Unanimity amongst ourselves.—And who ever asserted that it was expected so to do?—Are there not many Doctrines not at all mentioned in the Articles?—And therefore Latitude is undoubtedly allowed therein.—But that Subscription really prevents many Diversities of Opinion, or at least Diversities of Profession, (and is not this all that human Institutions can attempt to regulate?) even the Proposals themselves are a sufficient Proof.—For what have the Promoters of them to complain of, in Subscription, if it does not prevent them from professing Principles, different from those asserted in the Articles?—The Effect then of the Abolition of Subscription, could not but be the Introduction of much greater Diversity of Opinion, and also much greater Animosity

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latter, are more adapted to carry on secret Stratagems and Intrigues, and to practise every Means, how violent soever, to succeed.—To be convinced by Experience, that this Event must take Place, we need but reflect; how various were the Views of those, who united to destroy our Establishment, both civil and ecclesiastical, about the Middle of the last Century; and, as soon as that common Object was obtained, how speedily did that Variety disappear, and one prevailing Set domineer over the rest?—When the Friends of the Dissenters in *England*, in Queen *Anne's* Time, were labouring to save them from the Schism-Bill, and the Act against occasional Conformity; at that very Time came there not a Petition from *Scotland*, against even tolerating any of the episcopal Clergy there?—And what Opposition in these very Days is there, to the Appointment of an *American* Bishop; though the Design was to give him no Jurisdiction, farther than to govern the Clergy; and though the Necessities of the Colonists, who are in Communion with the Church of *England*, are evident?—And has not this
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last-mentioned Instance of Zeal for a Party been supported, by the very Persons who attack our Establishment; and by the Argument, “ *that Presbytery is there established, (no Matter whether that be Fact, or not;) and that therefore Episcopacy ought not there even to be tolerated?* ”——

All this is not to rekindle Animosities, but to shew that Attachments to Party must and will influence Men, to support that System of Religion, which they approve.——This was evident both when Presbytery and when Episcopacy prevailed in *Scotland*.——And therefore the Question to be determined by us is short; If we believe our Mode of professing Christianity to be the best, we shall do well to give our Hand to check an Attempt so destructive of our Establishment, as the proposed Application.——If on the contrary we disapprove our own Establishment, what hinders us from forsaking it; and going over to any Sect, where we think Christianity is professed in greater Purity?——But surely nothing can be so injudicious, and inconsistent, as for any, who really wish the Continuance of the Establishment, to suffer them-

themselves (through a mistaken Candour) to be cajoled out of their principal Fortress, and to admit those, who, by the Help of such a Lodgment, might (as we might too late perceive,) dispossess us of every other Post, which, as Christians, we must most wish to hold; and harraßs us with such Attacks, as our Charity would not permit us to distress them with.— We ought indeed to be “harmless as Doves;” and therefore we wish those who dissent from us, every Toleration consistent with our own religious Liberty: But we are also to be “wise as Serpents;” and therefore we cannot consent willingly to put our Necks under a Yoke, that we might well apprehend would be no “easy” one.

In this View, and with these Sentiments, the Clergy of the established Church in general consider the Scheme of the proposed Application to Parliament. Friendly as they are, and have approved themselves to be, to every generous Principle of a Toleration, disclaiming, as they have, in their whole Conduct, as well as in their Writings, every Measure of Severity to those,

those, who differ from them, every Design, which might seem in any Degree unfavourable to the religious Liberties of Mankind, and expressing on every Occasion the Zeal, which becomes them, in Support of that Government, whose Glory and Security it is to extend its Indulgence to all Religions, which can be tolerated with Safety to the State, they are not afraid of being thought to deviate from those Principles, in professing themselves satisfied with those Terms of an Establishment, which, they are persuaded, are necessary to the Preservation of Peace and Order in the Church, and are the proper Barriers and Fences of its Constitution.

Why then are the Clergy represented as wishing to be delivered from a Yoke of Bondage, which, unless we judge of the whole Body by a very few, has not yet been complained of, as a Grievance, which calls for the Remedy proposed? Were the Numbers then really so great, or the Persons, who attended the Meeting, advertised so long in the public Papers, so considerable in Station or Character, as to appear in any Degree, as the Representatives
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of the Clergy, or as having any Authority to declare *their* Sense of the Proposals? If I am not misinformed, not one Clergyman in the whole Diocese of *London*, though the Meeting was in the Metropolis, appeared to complain of the Grievance: If any attended from other Dioceses, they were very few, and their Names, if made public, may not perhaps give any great Reason to suppose, that they were the Delegates of the Clergy on an Occasion of so much Importance. The Clergy of the established Church have not yet, as far as I can learn, made any formal Declaration, that they are uneasy, or wish to be released from their Obligations to the Subscriptions, which the Laws of the Land require from them: I have conversed with many of them freely on the Subject, and have never yet discovered any Ground to suspect, that they are waiting with Impatience to be set free from the *Fetters*, as they are called, of *ecclesiastical Tyranny*. They are too tender of their Characters, too sensible of the Blessings of Peace and Order, to fall in with the licentious Humour of the Times, and wantonly to try the Experiment of new-modelling
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the Church of *England*, by throwing every thing into Confusion : They have seen with Indignation the Attempts, which have been lately made, to set Men loose from those Restraints, which the Wisdom of our Ancestors has placed as the Guards of our *civil* Constitution. And they see Reason to suspect, that the same restless Spirit, disappointed in its first Design, is now forming its Attack against that Part of the Establishment, which is in too near an Alliance with the State, not to expect, too well disposed to its Support and Security, not to deserve its Favour and Protection.

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